MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Often students think they are too young to make a difference. **Many Americans** believe that an individual can't change a majority. History has proven the opposite is true. McDonald's changed from styrofoam to paper because of a school campaign and boycott. Your class can make a difference. It's up to you, the teacher, to challenge your students to work to change the world for the better.



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A fter having explored the different aspects of the Mojave Desert, you and your class may be wondering what you can do to make a difference. Your students can now become teachers, passing the information they have learned to others. They can help others to recognize the different Mojave Desert ecosystems and to understand why each is important. There are a variety of ways to share the information learned.

Bulletin Boards — A school bulletin board presents an opportunity for creative sharing, combining art, writing, and research into one project. Bulletin board displays can include the different desert communities, inhabitants, and habitats. Endangered species and their protection can provide a focus for each community. Boards can also show how each community is intertwined with the others. This will give students an opportunity to conduct research and to look more closely at individual species of plants and animals. If a board is not available, consider creating an entire desert ecosystem hallway, from floor to ceiling, with wildlife peeping out from all corners.

Adopt — In many areas there are "adoption" programs. Your students might adopt a beach, an area in the desert, a piece of highway, or even a schoolyard. It will be their responsibility for the school year to keep the area clean and litter free. At the same time students can explore the concept of the "Three Rs": reduce, reuse, and recycle. Adopt the concept of the three Rs in your classroom. How can the students reduce, reuse, and recycle the things they use in school? Now look at home. How can students apply those concepts to their home life? Relate these discoveries to the preservation of the desert and the Earth.

Go Native — Have the students look at your schoolyard. What types of



plants are used in landscaping? Are the plants native to the desert, or do they require lots of water? Xerophytic plants are those adapted for growth under dry conditions. If your school did not landscape for the desert, have the class find out about planting a native plants garden. Often local nurseries will donate desert plants for such projects. Let the class explore the avenues of change. Who must be contacted, and what must be done to effect change? Each school will have different procedures. Your students may find it challenging to change the minds of administrators, school personnel, other students, and parents in regard to the benefits of xerophytic landscaping.

Write — Most areas have local nature clubs or chapters of better known national groups such as the Sierra Club and The Nature Conservancy. These organizations usually have members willing to come to classes and speak about the resource issues with which they are most concerned. Have your class contact a group to learn about these issues. Your students can then voice their opinions through letters to local and national politicians. Most politicians listen seriously to the concerns expressed by students, even though they are not yet voters, and this can be an important empowering experience for young people.

Advertise — Radio and television stations are required to present public service messages. Have your class contact the local stations and offer to write and record a public service message on preservation of the Mojave Desert. Why not involve drama and music teachers in this effort? Students can also contact local groups for information and support of desert environments.



Celebrate — As a culmination of Mojave Desert studies, your students may want to plan a "Desert Celebration." This is a way to get the entire school involved and to create awareness of the wonders of the desert. The class can make canvas grocery bags decorated with desert scenes. Students can make individual pledges, both written and spoken, to help protect the desert. The written pledges can be collected and displayed in a public area. Desert community mobiles can be made and hung in the classroom, cafeteria, auditorium, and front office. A large mural of the desert can be made and hung in the school. Many local businesses and malls welcome the opportunity to display school creations. Students can create posters, bumper stickers, and buttons as a way of enhancing desert awareness.

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Volunteer — Within the Mojave
Desert there are a variety of parks and agencies — local, state, and federal — that can offer your class an opportunity to make a difference in the community. Frequently there are a number of projects, such as revegetation of picnic areas or the creation of trail brochures, that cannot be funded and, therefore, remain unfinished. Individual volunteers and volunteer groups are often sought to contribute to the project's completion. Contact these agencies regarding projects that can involve your class.

Other Class Project Ideas:

- Create a slide program or video about your local desert.
- Create a play starring desert creatures.
- Create a parade float in support of desert conservation.
- Create a book of collected poems students have written about their desert home.
- Create and perform a desert rap. How about a raptor rap or a reptile rap?
- Sponsor a Desert Dime-A-Dance and give the proceeds to a desert conservation program.

